

Silent History Among the Trees

For 183 years, this simple headstone in the forest has marked the resting place of James Carroll. When he died in 1837 at age 60 he was far from his native Ireland, scratching a subsistence living with his wife, Mary Linden Carroll and at least four children (James, Patrick, John and Mary Ann) from a farmstead in the Millbrook Valley.

The Carrolls were among many Irish immigrants who made their way to this part of the Catskills. Others in the Millbrook area included the Kellys, Wards and Cantwells. They found work in local tanneries, lumber camps and mills, and cleared homesteads on the rocky hillsides. Cellar holes and stone foundations on these now-wooded hillsides are the remnants of their early homesteads.

Here's what we've learned about the family from census and other records on Ancestry.com, from newspaper accounts, from a memoir written by Verner Marks (1875-1966) and from long-time Millbrook resident Leonard Utter.

The Carrolls were in Middletown as early as 1830. James headed a household consisting of two 'foreigners, not naturalized,' (a male and a female, age 50-59, presumably James and Mary); a girl 5-9, a boy 10-14, and a man 20-29. Next door was their son Patrick and his young family, and elsewhere in town was another son, James Carroll, with a wife and small boy.

In 1837, James Carroll the elder died and was buried on what is now Tus-



carora Club land not far from the Gavette Cemetery at the base of Kelly Hollow. (The cemetery was likely not established at that point; early headstones there were actually moved from Arena when the Pepacton Reservoir was built in the 1950s.)

In 1840, Patrick Carroll, his wife and six kids were still living next door to Mary Carroll, James' widow, who had a 20-something male and a 15-20 year old female in the house. These would have been her youngest children John and

Mary Ann. It appears son James may have died, as a woman named Fanny Carroll, age 30-40, perhaps his widow, was living alone in what looks to be the Halcottsville area.

By 1850, widow Mary Carroll, 70, was residing in a boarding house in Clarks Factory (Dunraven) where a large tannery employed many men. Lawrence and Mary Wise and their teenage son lived in this house, which accommodated several 20- and 30-something Irish workers. Perhaps Mary was the cook or housekeeper.

Family Tree keeper Janet Letsinger indicates that Mary Carroll died in 1871. Perhaps she was buried next to her husband. There may be others there, too, as Len Utter recalls stumbling into several stones in the small graveyard while hunting 60 years ago. Only James's monument and a footstone are upright and visible today.

A story persists that this was the burial ground for several members of a family who died during a contagion in the 19-teens. This may stem from a

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The Bridge is published periodically
for members of The Historical
Society of the Town of Middletown.

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Print version printed at

ArtCo Copy Hut, Kingston, NY



Edward, son of Patrick and Mary (Polly) Murdock Carroll, had a sawmill on the Millbrook and lived with wife Margaret Hunt atop Cross Mountain, the farm later occupied by Bill Ryneck, now by Bill's daughter, Cindy Taylor, who provided this photo of unidentified members of the Carroll family at their homestead.

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Catskill Mountain News obituary for Margaret Hunt Carroll, widow of James and Mary's grandson Edward. Margaret, 82, passed away November 27, 1918 after an illness that had kept her bedridden for three years, not from the Spanish flu that was then raging. She died at the home of her daughter, Emily Carroll Kittle, in Millbrook. "On account of the illness of several members of her family they could not hold a public funeral and only a brief service was held at the home on Friday," reported the

News. Both Margaret and her husband Edward, who died in 1904, were buried in Arena, later to be reinterred in the Gavette Cemetery.

We know of no other Kittles, or Carrolls, who died during the pandemic, except one. When her mother passed away, Emily Carroll Kittle was still grieving her son Frank, who had died weeks earlier of influenza at a World War I recruiting camp in Syracuse. Frank was buried in Clovesville.

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Alexander Carroll of Millbrook wrote these short letters to his sister, Jerusha Akerly in Arena in early 1864 while he was serving as a private in Company I of the 47th NY Regiment, first in Florida, then in Virginia. The 33-year-old left his wife, Freelove Hilliker Carroll and three children to fight in the Civil War. It's not clear whether he knew that oldest son George, 10, had died two weeks before the date of this first letter.

To Mrs. Jerusha Akerly,
Lumberville, Delaware Co, NY
Floriday, Jackson vill
Feb the 26, 1864

Dear sister, I thought I wood nock of a few lines to let you no I am well and hope this will find you the saim. I sean all the boys in 144 (144th Regt) to day and thay air al well and look ruged and naturel.

I suppose you have heard about our giting drubbed out by the rebs we lost three hundred and foreteen out of our regiment it was the ruffest time I ever saw but we will pay them for it yet

My paper is scars and I have not much time So good by Jursha for this time.

Alexander Carroll

York town
April 25th 1864

Dear sister, With pleasur I seat my self to write a few lines to you to let you know I am well and hope to find you the saim. I left Palatka on the 14 and got hear the 21. I like it better hear the weather is not so hot hear although it was a very nice place their and nice oring groves and the treas was lodged with oringes and all in bloom at the saim time and they smelt very nice indeed.

I saw dick slack and peat hyser and pat sculin and bill sliter hear and several others that I was a quainted with and they al looked as ruged as bears Thair is lots of troops hear and thay ceap coming evry day I think we will soon hav a bully old fight and I hope we wil have better luck than we had before for I want to see them git one good dresin

Wel I don't think of eny thing morr to write so I wil close, good by.

Alick Carroll



Alexander did not survive the war. In June of 1864 he was wounded at the Battle of Cold Harbor and died two months later at DeCamp military hospital on David's Island in Long Island Sound. He is buried at Cypress Hills National Cemetery, Brooklyn. Thanks to Kerry Gracey, Jerusha Carroll Akerly's great-grand daughter, for sharing the letters.

How to Help HSM at year's end and all year long!

Donate: Protecting history doesn't come cheap: Every dollar helps!

Contribute: Cleaning out closets, the attic or your mom's house? Don't trash that stash of old stuff; let us have a look to see if it ought to be in the archives.

Volunteer: We need transcribers, researchers, cemetery helpers, gardeners . . .

Ideas: Got a suggestion for a program, exhibit or research topic?

Would you like to give a talk, or recommend a speaker?

Join: Become a member or give a membership to a history-loving friend! We need you!

Mtownhistory.org history@catskill.net 845-586-4973

We have a new trustee!

We are happy to introduce Eli Taylor as the newest HSM trustee! He was elected at the Annual Meeting along with returning Trustees Pat Moore, Josef Schoell and Doris Warner. Eli fills the seat of Barbara Moses, who has stepped down after several years of service to HSM. Other board members are Aggie Laub, Gary Smith, Michael Fairbairn and Diane Galusha.

Eli is a recent homeschool graduate from Margaretville and is currently employed by Outsiders Home Services. He has been involved with HSM for several years along with the rest of the Taylor family. This year he came to the Cauliflower Festival as a member of the Lost Battalion of WWI. He hopes to start reenacting in the near future.



Our annual report, in brief

Treasurer Pat Moore reports that HSM is in a strong financial position. The operating fund is healthy, and the building fund has grown with significant contributions this year, including \$75,000 from the O'Connor Foundation, \$50,000 from the Pasternak Family Foundation, a \$10,000 matching grant from Josef Schoell, and contributions from many members of our community. To date,

166 individuals, families, organizations, foundations and businesses have contributed a total of \$353,888 to this effort. Considerable progress has been made this year on the project — an addition to its Cemetery Road hall to house the HSM archives.

A number of programs were held during 2023: A history hike along the former U&D tracks in Highmount was held in April; the 10th Living History Cemetery Tour in June became an armchair tour when rain forced it indoors at the Open Eye Theater. In August, a program on major fires in Middletown was delivered, and in October 70 people turned out for Rick Brook's presentation on the Hardenburgh Patent and the history of surveying. An exhibit on master builders of Middletown was displayed at the Cauliflower Festival in September.

Donations of historic materials over the past year have included scrapbooks, photos and records on several local families. Nearly a complete run of the *Catskill Mountain News* for 1968 was discovered in her attic by Anna Blish, who donated them to HSM. They will be digitized and added to the NYS Historic Newspapers website which now holds the searchable News from 1902 through 1985.

Hurray, Halcottsville!

Sharon Suess (third from right) and several dozen friends and neighbors made history this spring while making a statement and earning Halcottsville an entry in the famed Guinness World Records registry. On May 20 they created the world's longest chain of plastic ring/pull tabs, which stretched 1,133 feet eight inches, nearly the entire length of the hamlet's Main Street. That's 16,069 tabs collected from donors far and wide. Thanks, Sharon, for orchestrating this tangible reminder of the evils of plastic proliferation in our world, and to the Chain Gang for putting the community on the map!





Rick Brooks, long time surveyor and historian in the Catskills, demonstrated the use of 'rod and chain' at his October presentation "The Hardenburgh Patent: A Surveyor's Journey." A full house of appreciative listeners included John VanBenschoten, a surveyor himself, who examined vintage equipment during the program, held at the Catskill Watershed Corp.



This short program was offered at the HSM Annual Meeting November 4 and was accompanied by pianist Kent Brown performing Pakatakan Waltz.

Today's program was born a few months ago when the Phoenicia Library donated to the HSM archives a piece of sheet music titled Pakatakan Waltz, dated Margaretville, 1900.

Pakatakan, as you know, is the name of the mountain, the river, the Native American camp with which Margaretville has been associated for many generations.

Let me introduce you now to two Margaretville residents whose lives intersect with this piece of music: William A. Laidlaw, a blacksmith. And Alexander Grant Jackson, a printer.

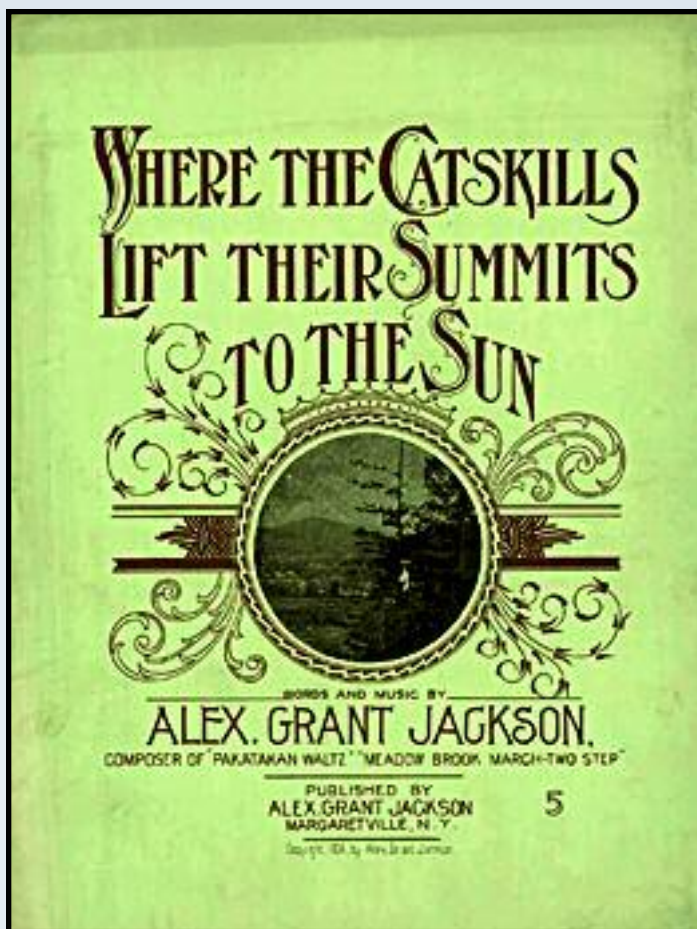
When the waltz was written, William was proprietor of the Main Street blacksmith shop his father Ebenezer had started in the 1870s. Alexander was a student at Syracuse University who worked by turns at the Utilitarian newspaper office where his lawyer father, James Knox Polk Jackson was editor and publisher.

William was 15 years older than Alexander, but the two must have been friends because in 1900, when 27-year-old Alexander wrote the piece of music you are about to hear, he dedicated it to the blacksmith down the street.

William Laidlaw, from what we have been able to determine, led a quiet and industrious life. He was born in 1858 in Margaretville and died 76 years later a stone's throw from his childhood

home. We don't know if he ever ventured much further, though several of his uncles went west.

He never married and lived with his parents, Ebenezer and Sabra Akerley Laidlaw and his sister Belle, who was also single. After his father died



Research on Margaretville music enthusiast Alexander Grant Jackson revealed that in addition to Pakatakan Waltz, written in 1900, he composed this romantic tune in 1904. The lyrics convey his affection for 'the village of my birth and boyhood' and 'the modest little blue-eyed maiden,' who shared 'honest country pleasures' with him. Zoom in on the photo: Is that Margaretville, Pakatakan Mountain and the 'maiden' herself? Jackson left Margaretville – without his maiden – in 1906, married, raised a family and spent the rest of his days in Washington State.

in 1910, William, Sabra and Belle shared the house until his mother died at the age of 91 in 1926. William died in 1934, Belle in 1943. All four Laidlaws share a plot in Margaretville Cemetery.

Alexander Jackson was a bit more adventurous. Born in 1873 in Oneonta, his parents were JKP Jackson and Julia Alice Grant. His father was a lawyer, real estate entrepreneur and newspaper editor in Franklin, Walton, Oneonta and Sidney before landing in Margaretville to take over the Utilitarian, competitor to Clarke Sanford at the *Catskill Mountain News*. (If you attended our 2022 Cemetery Tour you saw the two editors go toe to toe.)

As a teenager, Alexander taught school in Bragg Hollow, and after that attended Delaware Academy in Delhi, where he wrote the class song in 1893. In his early 20s, Alexander took a job with the customs service in NYC. But he returned to Margaretville and, like William Laidlaw, worked for his father for two years, serving as editor and printer for the paper. From 1897 to 1901 he attended SU where he was a member of the Glee Club.

The *Catskill Mtn News* tells us he was a member of the Margaretville band in 1902, and that same year, with C. J. Dickson, "attended the Shavertown Fair, making the journey down the river in a row boat." He was also a school commissioner, a Mason, an Oddfellow and a foreman with Pakatakan Hose Company. Both he and

sister Fanny were organists at the Margaretville Methodist Church.

But Alexander Jackson felt his future lay elsewhere, and in the spring of 1906 pulled up stakes and went to Seattle where he worked as a survey-

or for a year, then attended the University of Washington to study forestry, earning a master's degree in 1909. In Seattle, he entertained eastern visitors, including his sister Lulu who stayed with him in the summer of 1909 when she went to the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, a world's fair held on the campus of the University of Washington.

Alexander met Mabel McMurray at college. When they married in June of 1911, she was a science teacher and he was a district ranger with the US Forest Service in Berlin, WA. Within 3 years, they had two children, Alexander and Mabel, named for their parents.

By 1917 they had moved to Portland, OR where he was a supervisor with

the Forest Service. Alexander held various positions with the USFS for the next two decades, and by 1940, he was retired in Grants Pass, OR with Mabel and their grown children.

Alexander died Nov. 9, 1946 at the age of 73. His wife Mabel followed just 4 months later. Sadly, their children appear to have been disabled. They never married, and after their parents' deaths, spent most of their lives institutionalized. Like the Laidlaws in Margaretville, all four Jacksons lie together, in Granite Hill Cemetery, Grants Pass, Oregon.

To get back to the music. Alexander Jackson wrote Pakatakan Waltz for piano when he was 27. We have to as-

sume the Utilitarian print shop turned out the sheet music, which was available from the composer for 25 cents, according to the Roxbury Times. We know from a later account that he was an "enthusiastic musician" who also wrote something called "Where the Catskills Lift Their Summits to the Sun." (Kent Brown played this tune as well, a love song to a woman and their hometown.)

His reason for dedicating Pakatakan to friend and neighbor William Laidlaw, who unlike Alexander Jackson remained rooted in Margaretville his entire life, is lost to history.

Let's listen to the waltz that forever connects them.

Pianist Kent Brown performed the music of Alexander Grant Jackson at the HSM Annual Meeting November 4.



THE 68¢ POST

THE 68¢ POST is an exclusive for members who receive *The Bridge* via e-mail — your newsletter needs no postage, so you get an “extra”!

Hans Kraus 1905-1996, (next to local ski legend Dot Knebel in this 1950s photo) was a pioneering rock climber, standout skier and a savior to athletes and others suffering from back pain. At a time when immobilization was typically employed for those so ailing, Kraus, an Austrian-born orthopedic surgeon, successfully treated patients using exercise. His clientele included President John F. Kennedy, who suffered from debilitating back pain for 20 years before Kraus was called, in secret, to help him. Dr. Kraus was the medical advisor to the Belleayre Mountain Ski Patrol for 25 years. His studies, with Dr. Sonja Weber, on the lack of strength and flexibility in children led Pres. Dwight D. Eisenhower to establish the President’s Council on Youth Fitness. Among Kraus’s publications were *The Complete Skiers Guide* in 1940 and the landmark *Backache, Stress and Tension*, (1965) which sold over a million copies.



Old News is Good News, Again

More than half a century of the *Roxbury Times* and 12 more years of the *Catskill Mountain News* have been added to the Historic New York Newspapers website, managed by the Northern New York Newspaper Project.

Their placement online allows anyone anywhere to search, read and print these valuable chronicles of local lore. The *Times* and the *News* are among 19 Delaware County titles on the website, NYSHistoricNewspapers.org.

The Historical Society of the Town of Middletown had previously preserved the CMN from 1902 through 1973. In 2022, HSM arranged to have the

CATSKILL MOUNTAIN NEWS

bound issues from 1974 through 1985 microfilmed and the microfilm scanned and added to the previously posted issues. The hard-bound volumes of the original News are housed at Fairview Public Library. The microfilm and digital versions are protected in the HSM Archives.

Thirteen HSM supporters contributed more than \$1,500 towards this phase of the CMN project. Our sincere

thanks to these generous donors: Former CMN Publisher Dick Sanford, Marilyn Kaltenborn, Georgi Fairlie, Jenn Kabat and David Rainbird, Jean King, Carol Gates, Mark and Ann Lukin, Merri Blocker, Gary and Barb Atkin, Agnes and Milton Laub, John Kelly and Suzanne Greene, Val Liles and Richard Kelly.

Roxbury Town Historian Anthony Liberatoro coordinated the digitization of microfilm of the *Roxbury Times* from Sept. 19, 1895 to June 16, 1951. The O’Connor Foundation, the Town of Roxbury and historian/author Larry Zuidema funded the Roxbury project.
